

hands that stitch by ConvenientAlias

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Summary:

Kali's next target happens to be a guest lecturer at Nancy's college.

hands that stitch

Nancy really only meets the girl because she's being stupid. She's not at the guest lecture to socialize—honestly, she's not even at the guest lecture to learn about the material manifestations of brain waves, though the subject is interesting enough—she's here to get a good look at Doctor Gretz and figure out what his deal is. She knows he was involved with the lab in Hawkins; it came up in his research. She also knows that unlike many others, he got away without being arrested or even attracting media attention. What she doesn't know is how deeply involved he was, or whether there's anything she can do to take him down.

Anyways, for her purposes she should be focused on Gretz, not on the people around her. But when she sees the pretty girl in the back row she sits down next to her without thinking about it. Because purple hair. *Purple hair*. She's gorgeous, and Nancy has never seen her before, and hell, she can multitask; this is a girl she wants to know. She offers her hand enthusiastically, and it's a moment before the girl notices. At last she shakes her hand, though her grip is light.

"Nancy Wheeler," Nancy says.

The girl's eyes widen for a moment, as if the name means something to her. Then her expression smoothes over. "Kali," she says, no last name. "You're interested in brain science?"

"Very," Nancy says, even though she's a journalism major and brain science is way out of her field. "I guess I'm not very involved in the biology branch, though... I don't think we've met before?" She blushes when Kali gives her a cool look. So not subtle. "Anyway, I guess this guy's famous. A lot of people showed up... I hope you don't mind I sat next to you."

"I assure you I won't let it distract me." Kali offers a last polite smile, then looks straight ahead, and Nancy gets the hint. She looks forward too.

The talk goes on and on. Nancy absorbs very little of it. Gretz uses the most complex vocabulary he can think of, and even the slide-

show he has prepared is beyond un-useful. She does get that he knows what he's talking about (some of the biology majors seem enthralled) and that he's a complete ass; in the Q and A portion he laughs every time someone asks a question and drawls an answer that only confuses matters further.

It's all very boring.

Nancy's gaze strays, again and again, to the girl sitting next to her. Her hair isn't just purple—it's thick and dark and amazingly long, utterly luscious. Nancy also likes her makeup. It's thick and dark and oh so appealing. "*Little rebel*," she can hear an imaginary Steve murmur in her ear, and yes, her type is simplistic but damn. *Damn*.

But Kali isn't one of the punks typical in high-school, who would show up for class and stare out the window, skipping whenever they could and laughing at the professor. (This was also Nancy's type, though she thinks she's kind of grown out of it.) No. She's the most focused person in the room, staring down at Gretz and listening to every word. And if looks could kill...

After the lecture, Nancy plans to catch a word with her, maybe find out what in the lecture she found so interesting. But Kali vanishes into the crowd, and Nancy can only resolve to keep an eye out for her later.

It's for the best, really. She needs to refocus on her objective: Learning more about Gretz. Step one of the plan, going to the lecture, is now achieved. Step two is going to speak to the man in person.

Doctor Gretz.

Doctor Gretz.

A more pathetic piece of scum Kali has never...well, no, that's not true. Kali has known worse scum—she unfortunately has known quite a few monsters. But Doctor Gretz always did leave a bad taste in her mouth. He never hurt her directly. He never fried her with electricity

and radiation or waterboarded her or shut her up in a sensory deprivation tank or pricked her with needles or injected her with chemicals. He just stood back with the others and muttered how fascinating, how fascinating. When he talked to Brenner it was always in a sycophantic murmur, and Brenner would condescend to laugh at his bad jokes and act like he was insightful. He never hurt Kali. He just went along with—no, even idolized—the people that did.

If he wanted to be like them, he can die like them. Kali is a wish-granter.

She finds out he's coming out of hiding to guest lecture at a college. He should know better—everyone in the labs, all the influential scientists, know someone's hunting them down and they need to watch their backs—but it must have been too much for his ego. She won't blame him for that. Hiding sucks, after all. But that's what he and his ilk forced her to do. Hide.

She goes to the lecture disguised as a student and listens to his inane interpretations of crueler men's experiments. All the students listen very seriously and take notes. She has half a mind to kill them, too, for their awe at these discoveries made so inhumanely, but she clenches her fists and reminds herself that they don't know the discoveries' source. It's not their fault. They can be forgiven.

The idiots.

There is one student here who's not an idiot, though, and she throws Kali off. Nancy Wheeler. What is Nancy Wheeler, the girl whose article caused large portions of the lab to shut down and got many scientists arrested, doing here? Kali's heart beats fast. She's wondered about Wheeler sometimes, wanted to get a good look at her, but this is not a good time. It can't possibly be a coincidence that she's here, can it? And could it jeopardize Kali's plans?

She forces herself to ignore her and focus on Gretz. Gretz. Gretz will die tonight.

She knows Gretz's schedule. She knows that he's going to be visiting one Professor Lang in his office tonight, and she knows where

Professor Lang's office is. She goes to the office and knocks on the door, and Professor Lang lets her in. It's the easiest access to a target she's ever had.

Professor Lang's an innocent, so she lets him down easy. She gives him and Gretz both a vision that the whole room has gone black and as Gretz timidly asks, "Dr. Lang? I think the power has gone out?", she pulls Lang down and injects him with a sedative she stole from a pharmacy. She covers his mouth until he goes unconscious. He barely makes any noise.

"Dr. Lang?" Gretz says a bit louder. He stands, eyes unseeingly searching the room. Kali lowers Lang carefully to the ground. Yeah, she knows a little about brain science, enough to know to avoid giving someone a concussion. Then she steps over him, stands in front of Gretz, and lets the darkness slip away. Lets him see her.

He blinks.

"You recognize me, doctor?" she asks.

"Eight," he says. His eyes are wide. And as she opens her mouth to speak again, he lunges.

He shoves her against the desk, knocking over a pile of books, small, bony hands on her throat. She gasps for air. Who could have known the worm grew a backbone since she saw him last? Regrets flicker through her mind. She should have brought someone with her—but no, Dottie and Funshine have quit, and Axel and Mick needed that break—anyways there's no time for that kind of thinking. She pulls her knife out, flicks it open, and stabs it into his gut. That's the problem with strangling someone with both hands. You leave your front wide open.

He stumbles back, and she pushes him off. But he's taken her knife with him. If he knew anything about wounds he'd leave it in but he pulls it out and waves it at her. She grabs a book and blocks, but the knife skips off and gashes deep into her thigh. Shit. She grabs his wrist with one hand and hits him in the face with the book, shattering his glasses. He's still fighting to bring the knife up, but he hollers at being hit in the face, and his grip on the knife loosens, and

she snatches it away, just barely nicking her palm. She moves in and cuts his throat, and that's it, it's over. He grips his throat and gurgles at her. She pants and shrugs. His eyes accuse her of murder, but she's not sorry.

The one who should be sorry is him.

But when adrenalin leaves her, she's tired and hurt. Her throat aches, her clothes are all stained in blood, and her thigh—shit, that's a bad wound. She has to get home fast...

Someone's knocking on the door.

"Dr. Lang?"

No, no, no. There's no window, no easy way out. And the lights are on, there's no way the student will think no one's in, and the door's unlocked. She'll have to cloak herself, make the student not see anyone. But her head's already ringing from exhaustion and from earlier and...

"Dr. Lang?"

Wait. She knows that voice. Only heard it briefly, but she knows it.

Nancy Wheeler. Nancy fucking Wheeler.

Maybe it's insanity that makes her open the door. Maybe it's hope. Nancy's eyes scan over her, but she only gapes for an instant. Then she pushes her way inside, checks the pulse of Dr. Lang's prone body, looks at Dr. Gretz who is by now quite dead, and turns back to Kali. "You killed him," she said.

"He would have killed me," she says, because even if she would have killed him anyway, defenseless or no, something about Nancy's gaze makes her want to explain herself.

"You left Dr. Lang alive," she said. She touches Kali's arm and her hand is steady, not threatening. "You're here because of Dr. Gretz's involvement with the, uh, experiments?"

"He..." Kali swallows. "He hurt me," she says, unsure if she means

her thigh or her past or what, only that she doesn't just want to explain herself, she needs to, but now that it seems Nancy is actually listening, she doesn't know what to say.

Nancy glances down at Kali's bleeding leg. "Shit." She takes Kali's arm and pulls her to the door. "Yeah, we need to get you out of here."

Kali stupidly follows. It's Nancy Wheeler. She wants to trust her.

Unsurprisingly Nancy Wheeler has a first aid kit in her dorm room. What she does not have is a private bathroom, so she drags Kali off to the floor bathroom and into one of the communal showers. She demands Kali undress and wash, and Kali reluctantly does so. The water is cold, and it stings all over, but it actually numbs the wound a bit so she doesn't mind after a minute or so. And it's good to get the blood off, though Nancy, doubtless a little stunned, forgot to bring the soap, and so Kali simply lets it rinse off her. A little of the smell will probably linger, but it won't be much different from the smell of a period.

Then they turn the water off and Nancy dries Kali off and hurries her back to the room. Kali puts back on a shirt (a sweatshirt of Nancy's which is long enough to cover Kali's privates and smells like tea and softness), sits down on Nancy's bed and lets her get a good look at her leg.

Nancy puts antiseptic on the wound, which stings what had only just grown numb. She has medical thread and a needle in the first aid kit, and she uses them well enough, though when Kali asks she admits she has more experience sewing up cloth than skin.

She talks as she sews, rambles about how she'd suspected Gretz's involvement in shady business and that was why she came to the lecture, but didn't really know anything for sure. Doesn't ask Kali any questions yet, which to Kali is a relief. Until she pulls the last stitch through, cuts and knots the thread, and gives Kali a questioning look.

Kali says, “You did a good job. Can I borrow a pair of pants?”

“Sure.” Nancy doesn’t move to get any, though. She crosses her arms. “So. I’ve shared what I knew about Gretz, and I’ve given you a hand. Maybe you could explain why I found you in a room with his dead body and with blood all over yourself?”

Kali is recovered by now, though. She says, “Gretz was not a good man, as you’ve already said. His death was only what he had coming. I’m sure you can see that.”

“Yeah, I can, but we aren’t all weapons of karma. What’s your stake in the game?”

“That’s not something you need to know.”

“I saw the tattoo on your wrist. The eight.”

Kali starts.

“I know that they experimented on kids in the labs. I’ve met one of your kind before. She had the number too.”

Kali closes her eyes. She almost asks, “*Which one?*” She almost lets herself break down, too. She’s explained what happened to her to many people before—the family she used to have, the squad she has now, and at one point even to an unbelieving police officer during the very brief period of time she believed in the law. But she’s never before met someone who already knew and was already on her side. It’s a miracle. It’s Nancy Wheeler, the miracle who shut down the labs in the first place, a woman who shouldn’t exist or at least should never have met Kali, and Kali wants to accept this miracle and tell Nancy everything and see what she’ll say, what she’ll do, how the woman who condemned the labs and Brenner will judge her. She wants to put her weight in Nancy’s hands.

But she pulls herself together. Takes a few deep breaths. Then she sighs and says, “Whatever you know about the labs, I promise you there are things you would never understand. I’m one of them. But I appreciate your help.”

“I could help you more if I knew more. You’re seeking justice against

them—that's my quest too."

"I don't think we have similar methods," Kali says drily.

"No, but..." Nancy trails off. "I just want to help you."

Kali smiles. "I don't need help from you. And I'm not as alone as I look. Just tonight." She pats Nancy's cheek. "But I appreciate it. I'd appreciate pants more."

Nancy rolls her eyes. "Fine. Just a second."

The first pair of pants, a pair of jeans, don't fit. Nancy's too skinny, and besides, they shouldn't have rough cloth chafing the wound. They find a pair of sweatpants, though, that fits pretty well. Kali slips it on, wincing at how the stitches stretch. She nods at Nancy. "If I can have a bag for the old clothes, I'll throw them in a dumpster somewhere. Blood like that doesn't wash out."

"Sure, just a sec..."

She takes the bag and walks to the door. Pauses. "Thank you. I don't think many people would have helped me in this situation." Probably says something about Nancy's sanity that she did.

"I, uh, was glad to help." Nancy awkwardly gives Kali a hug. "Take care of yourself."

"I always do."

A couple years later during summer break, Nancy gets dragged over to the Hopper house. Apparently a friend of El's has just recently gotten back in contact with her and El wants her to meet everybody, like, everybody. Nancy doesn't even know El that well—mostly knows her through her brother—but figures what the heck.

The friend has long hair with a purple streak that has apparently been maintained through the years. The makeup is still just as dark, but the face itself is more relaxed. Nancy gapes.

"This is Kali," El says, smiling but a little self conscious. She's slicked her hair back and put on makeup, something she always does when she wants to look cool, something that always calls attention to how young she is in the end. She's in high school now but Nancy knows now that high school is still damn young.

"And Kali, this is Nancy. She's my friend."

Kali's lips twitch. She offers a hand. "Nancy Wheeler. Nice to meet you."

Nancy takes the hand and smiles back. "Nice to meet you, Kali."

She stays for dinner. It's her and Mike and Kali and El and Hopper and Dustin and Luke and Max and Will, all of them squeezed in here—the kind of thing that kind of makes her wonder where Jonathan and Steve and Joyce are, but then, if they were here they wouldn't all fit in the room and Hopper wouldn't be able to feed them. The boys and El babble over the conversation, El telling them about Kali very vaguely and Kali only occasionally speaking for herself. Nancy hopes that if people notice her staring at Kali they don't think she's being rude.

After dinner she takes Kali aside, though she's not sure what to say to her. She settles on, "How have you been?"

"I've been well, thank you."

"Done any..."

"The usual. But with some of your exposees out, there wasn't much left to do. I suppose I've settled down." Kali shrugs. "El thinks I should move in, but I don't think I could stay here long. It's too near the labs."

Nancy nods. "Remember where we met?"

"Of course. It was a memorable night."

"I have an apartment there. Think I'll be staying a while. It's a good city."

"I like cities more than the country," Kali says. "Hm. Well. And how have you been?"

"Oh, uh, just college stuff."

"You know, I've thought about you sometimes."

She's thought about Kali too. Sometimes. "And what did you think?" That she was insane to take a stranger and a murderer into her room and patch her up? Or maybe, hopefully, that she was kind.

Kali touches her own thigh. "Thought about your hands." She looks over at Nancy, and her eyes glitter.

Nancy swallows. "Oh." Well. That's...nice.

"You did good work on my leg. It barely scarred."

"That's good."

"Would you like to see it?"

"Ah. I...yeah." Nancy isn't misinterpreting this, right? "You could come over to my place in a little bit. Or tomorrow night, maybe?"

"All right," Kali agrees. "I hope you'll still find me exciting in a less bloody context."

Nancy stifles a laugh. "Yes, well. I think so."

Her hopes are high, and she thinks they're justified. But she also wonders a bit if Kali's ready to talk about her past, to talk about what it is she's doing with her life, to let Nancy in. For that, she supposes, she'll have to wait and see.

Author's Note:

the ending's a little out of place with the rest but i strongly felt that they would meet again eventually, so i thought i might as well show it happening. anyways my opinion is that nancy would absolutely back you up in a murder if she thought you were

justified, and kali is quite justified, so.

wrote a kalancy piece bc someone wrote a remix of one of my other kalancy pieces btw. and i remembered how much i ship kalancy! what a ship. comments and kudos are always welcome, or come talk to me on tumblr at convenientalias. (sometimes i take femslash prompts.)